



PLANNING **Raleigh** 2030

A COMPREHENSIVE PLAN FOR THE NEXT GENERATION

PLANNING RALEIGH 2030: An Update to the Comprehensive Plan

The following document is an excerpt from the Request for Proposals that was advertised in January of 2007. It incorporates minor updates as of May 2007. It is posted here to provide background and context on the Comprehensive Plan Update and the issues and opportunities the Update is intended to address.

City of Raleigh
Department of City Planning

I. PLANNING CONTEXT

A. Overview

Raleigh is the capital of North Carolina. It is also the largest municipality in both Wake County and the Research Triangle region, an economic region centered on the Research Triangle Park. The City and region's recent history has been one of rapid growth, both in terms of population and the economy. Within Raleigh's jurisdiction, approximately 5,500 new housing units have been certified for occupancy and 4.5 million square feet of non-residential floor space have been permitted, on average, in each of the past five years. Wake County is one of the fastest growing counties in the nation with a population estimated to exceed 950,000 by 2020. The City of Raleigh has more than 350,000 residents as of July 2006, reflecting population growth of more than 70,000 since the year 2000. The City adds about 12,000 new residents a year. Eighty-five percent of the City's population is the result of post-WWII growth.

The Research Triangle Region includes approximately 1.2 million residents and encompasses the communities of Raleigh, Durham, Chapel Hill, and Cary. Universities in the region include North Carolina State University, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Duke University, NC Central University, Shaw University, Meredith College, St. Augustine's College and Peace College. The region is a hotbed of technology and research activity. Research Triangle Park (20 miles west) is the home of major facilities for IBM, Northern Telecom, Glaxo-Smith-Kline, US EPA, Cisco Systems and other technology companies. North Carolina State University's Centennial Campus has during the past four years drawn a variety of private sector partners in pharmaceutical research, advanced engineering and software applications.

Like all municipalities in North Carolina, Raleigh enjoys broad annexation powers and has been able to expand both its corporate limits and its planning (extra-territorial) jurisdiction over time to take in development on its suburban fringe. A recent capacity analysis of the 20,000+ acres of vacant land within the City's jurisdiction estimates that there is the capacity for another 120,000 housing units and about 85 million square feet of non-residential floor space under current zoning, and without significant intensification of existing development patterns. Another 20,000+ acres of land, much of it lightly developed or underdeveloped, is programmed for future annexation in the City's short- and long-range Urban Services Areas.

This rapid growth has left the City and County with the need to rapidly expand and upgrade services and infrastructure to meet the needs of an expanding population and jobs base. As examples:

- Public education is provided by Wake County; current expansion plans over the next 6 years call for approximately 30 new school sites throughout the County, with several of these sites

targeted for Raleigh's high growth northwest, north, northeast and southeast areas. Municipal participation in school siting has historically been weak, but the County and municipalities are now working more closely together to identify and reserve school sites.

- The City and State DOT have been aggressively expanding the area roadway network to meet increased traffic demand. The City's Beltline (I-440), a circumferential freeway once the dividing line between the "in-town" neighborhoods and the suburbs of "North Raleigh," is now being encircled by a new ring road five miles further out known as the Outer Loop (I-540). One portion of this roadway, known as the Western Wake Expressway, may become the region's first toll road. U.S. 1 north of I-540 is planned to be converted into a limited access highway over time.
- Further, in response to concerns over congestion, air quality, and mobility, a number of potential transit investments are under consideration and study, including Light Rail and Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) options.
- Drinking water to support future growth remains an issue. The County limits development intensity around the City's major watersheds, including Falls Lake, and is already pursuing acquisition of land for a new drinking water reservoir northeast of the City.

While the majority of the City's development has been and continues to occur on greenfield sites at the City's fringes, infill development and redevelopment have been a growing share of total activity. The City's downtown has seen a significant surge in both public and private investment, including the groundbreaking for the U.S. headquarters for the Royal Bank of Canada, and nearly 1,000 new housing units either constructed or soon to come on line. Major infill projects have also been approved at two key retailing hubs—Crabtree and North Hills—located along the Beltline. As congestion increases and land becomes scarcer, it is anticipated that interest in intensifying development patterns along key transportation corridors and in central locations will increase.

B. Recent Trends and Events

The first five years of the 21st Century saw both a continuation of past trends, as well as the passing of significant milestones and the emergence of new trends.

- ***Downtown Revitalization:*** Raleigh's downtown has gone through multiple cycles of decline, rebuilding, and reconfiguration over its 200+ year history. If the traditional downtown was primarily a pre-war phenomenon, Raleigh entered the post-war period with a downtown sized for a small town of fewer than 50,000 people. Since that time, significant portions of the

downtown fabric have been eroded through teardowns for surface and structured parking. Downtown streets have been closed for redevelopment, including Halifax Street for the State Government Center, and Cabarrus Street for Hanover Square; or reconfigured for traffic efficiency. In recent times, the downtown saw a spurt in office construction when its tallest two buildings were completed in 1991, but retail and residential continued to languish. The market entered a new era as the 21st century dawned, and today the downtown is experiencing significant residential growth, mostly in the form of multi-story mixed-use condominium buildings with structured parking. The development of the new Convention Center is also catalyzing new hotel development, and the office inventory has been expanded by new headquarters buildings for Progress Energy (completed 2 years ago) and the Royal Bank of Canada (under construction). At the street level, new restaurants and nightlife uses have led the re-tentanting of long-vacant storefronts.

- ***Fayetteville Street & the Livable Streets Plan:*** A significant portion of the recent spurt in downtown development can be attributed to the implementation of the Livable Streets Plan, which set forth five big initiatives to be accomplished in five years (the Five in Five strategy). These were the demolition of the existing convention center and creation of a new center one block west; the reopening of Fayetteville Street Mall as a vehicular street; pedestrian realm improvements, including the reintroduction of two-way traffic on selected streets; regulatory reform, and downtown management. All five are either complete or substantially implemented. The recent reopening of Fayetteville Street has caused a particular splash; the “Raleigh Wide Open” celebration drew about 60,000 to downtown, and new restaurants and retail are beginning to spring up along the street and on adjacent side streets.
- ***Suburban redevelopment:*** While much attention has been on the downtown, the past few years have seen a significant retooling and intensification of established “inner ring” suburban shopping centers and neighborhoods. The redevelopment of North Hills, the City’s first enclosed shopping mall, into a neo-traditional mixed-use format has served as a catalyst for rising property values in the surrounding neighborhoods. An even bigger redevelopment proposal brought forth by the same developer (“North Hills East”) has been approved for a property assemblage across Six Forks Road. Two major redevelopments have been approved around Crabtree Mall, the City’s second enclosed mall. One of these, the Soleil Center, is proposed to be the City’s tallest building; the other, known as Crabtree Village, will be one of the most ambitious infill projects undertaken in the City in terms of remaking a topographically challenged site into a high-density, mixed-use destination. Outside of commercial areas, incremental infill development is intensifying established neighborhoods, both through lot recombinations that squeeze additional density out of existing properties, and tear-downs which lead to larger homes.

- **Population growth:** The City's population has been on an accelerating growth path for the past 100 years. An estimated 70,000 people have been added to the City's population in just six years since the 2000 Census. Growth has been aided by the City's past annexation of important growth areas, including the developments known as Wakefield and Brier Creek.
- **Growth centers:** The major portion of the city's residential and non-residential growth has coalesced in three distinct areas: (1) the Brier Creek area in the northwest section of the City, around the intersection of I-540 and U.S. 70; (2) in the northeast quadrant of the City, where significant areas of undeveloped land exist, and where the opening of I-540 has provided vastly improved access to major employment centers; and (3) in the southeast where the remaining large tracts of commercial and industrial land are found. Areas (1) and (2) contain Regional Focus Areas, which are programmed in the current Comp Plan for more intensive mixed-use development.

C. Recent Planning and Public Policy Activities

DCP is undertaking the following planning initiatives that will inform the Comprehensive Plan. Information on each of these initiatives can be found at www.raleighnc.gov/planning.

- **The Wayfinding Study:** A study currently underway to develop a wayfinding system for the downtown and its environs. The new Convention Center, currently under construction, is already exceeding expectations for bookings by as much as 100 percent, underscoring the need for an effective signage system to direct visitors how best to get downtown and find all of the many different attractions and districts. It is anticipated that the study will be complete by Fall of 2007, with implementation to occur over the following 12 months.
- **Intermodal Transportation Study:** A comprehensive look at a complex rail junction on the west side of Downtown that has been proposed as the focus for a number of existing and future passenger and commuter rail services, and a potential new location for the local bus transfer hub. The study is expected to kick off in the Spring of 2007 and last for approximately 10 months.
- **Downtown Parking Study:** A comprehensive study of parking within the downtown area and adjacent pedestrian business districts is currently being contemplated. If budgeted, the study is expected to go out to bid in the Spring of 2007 and get underway during the summer. Unlike past studies which focused exclusively on whether and where to build a municipal parking deck, the new study will analyze on- as well as off-street supply and parking management practices with a view towards maximizing the utilization and benefit of existing off-street facilities and on-street capacity.

- **Big Ideas Planning Week:** Raleigh is an emerging 21st Century that will be one of the top 50 most populated cities within the next few years. To capitalize on Raleigh's growth, national planning visionaries and local experts will be assembled in 2007 to explore big ideas for Raleigh's urban core. The week will serve as a creative outlet, an opportunity to think big about Raleigh's future and to identify unique opportunities to capitalize on Raleigh's rising international status.
- **Public Realm Strategy:** A detailed assessment of the public realm elements in the downtown, including sidewalks and streetscapes, public plazas and parks, pedestrian facilities, street furniture, and public art. A RFP will be issued in 2007. The study should take 12 months to complete.
- **Private Use of Public Space:** A new and simplified regulatory regime for such activities as sidewalk cafes, street and sidewalk vending, and street performers has been drafted as is currently before the City Council for approval.
- **Downtown Overlay District:** The primary zoning vehicle for the downtown core continues to evolve. The text was recently amended to permit increased residential densities. Under consideration are possible exemptions to certain of the City's parking, open space, tree preservation, and stormwater standards. A text change for the open space and parking exemptions could be adopted as early as Spring 2007.
- **Dorothea Dix Conceptual Plan:** Several entities, including Wake County, the City of Raleigh and a team of experts from the Urban Land Institute have prepared a conceptual plan and strategy for the reuse of the Dorothea Dix campus, a State-owned historic and pastoral mental health facility occupying 306 acres in close proximity to downtown. The County/City and ULI plans call for a significant urban park component, as well as new residential and mixed-use development and the retention through lease agreements of some mental health offices on the site. The State Legislature may make a decision on the disposition of the Dix property in 2007.
- **Southwest Planning District Update:** An update to the district plan for the Southwest District has been prepared and is currently before the Council for approval. A centerpiece of the plan is a development strategy for the area south of NC State and enveloping the Mission Valley shopping plaza, which calls for new housing and mixed use development as well as open space amenities.
- **City Plaza Design:** City Plaza is a public square that used to be a component of the Fayetteville Street pedestrian mall and served as the front door to the City's Convention Center. With the removal of the mall and demolition of the old Convention Center, a significant redesign is necessary. Project for Public Spaces conducted a three-day charrette in

February 2007 to generate a concept, program, preliminary design, and management plan for the Plaza. A specific design for the Plaza has been approved by the City Council and is expected to be implemented as designed assuming that a funding gap can be bridged.

- **Hillsborough Street Roundabouts:** The Hillsborough Street Partnership, with funding provided by the City, has developed an improvement plan for Hillsborough Street, the City's longest traditional retail street and the front door to NC State University's north campus. The plan calls for extensive streetscape improvements as well as major changes in street geometry, going from a four to two-lane configuration with double-loaded on-street parking. The most striking feature of the plan is its proposal to maintain traffic flow through the replacement of 11 traditional intersections with modern roundabouts. The first phase of improvements, stretching from Oberlin Road to Brooks Avenue, and including two roundabouts at Pullen and Oberlin Roads, has been approved by Council and is moving forward to a 75 percent design.

A variety of planning activities are also completed or underway in other City and regional agencies and departments, including:

- **Housing Best Practices:** The City has commissioned a study of affordable housing and neighborhood revitalization best practices from three peer cities known for innovative neighborhood-based initiatives: Richmond, St. Petersburg, and Greensboro. The study kicked off in November of 2006 and was completed in March of 2007. DCP and Community Development staff are currently reviewing the report and its implications for neighborhood planning in Raleigh.
- **Center of the Region Enterprise (CORE):** The CORE report contains a detailed look at land use and transportation issues and policies affecting an area that includes portions of Raleigh, Durham City/County, Cary and Morrisville. The plan affects the Briar Creek portion of Raleigh. A key transit opportunity is for a transit loop that would connect existing and future TTA services with a wider array of destinations.
- **Economic Development Policy:** North Carolina voters recently passed enabling legislation for Tax Increment Financing (known as Project Development Financing through Self Financing Bonds in North Carolina). The City is now considering whether to adopt a formal policy for the use of Project Development Financing specifically and public sector financial participation in private development projects generally. This effort is being led by the City Manager's office with support from DCP and the Finance Department, as well as the participation of the County.
- **Regional Transit Blueprint:** Triangle J-COG, along with the two regional MPOs, is conducting a detailed evaluation of potential transit investments along identified corridors.

The analysis, which is anticipated to conclude in October of 2007, includes the creation of a regional GIS database of population and employment projections; land use data; travel market data (aggregated from TAZs and utilizing trip data from the Triangle Regional Model); and a cost analysis. The blueprint will produce a short list of recommended corridors and investments by type (rail, bus rapid transit, etc.).

- **US 1 Corridor Study.** CAMPO has retained the consulting firm of RS&H to undertake a study of the US Highway 1 corridor between the I-540 interchange and the interchange with US Highway 1A in Franklin County. The study kicked off in late 2005 with public information sessions being held in the spring and summer of 2006. The study is driven by four factors: (1) the need for considerable physical improvements to restore capacity; (2) the need to evaluate current and future land uses along the corridor before making capital investments; (3) the need to preserve future right-of-way and ensure connectivity; and (4) the need for a balanced, multi-modal approach. Under consideration is a Memorandum of Understanding including all counties and municipalities with land use authority along the corridor, which would include the creation of a Council of Planning to review major land use changes within the corridor area.
- **TTA Regional Rail System Plan:** The Triangle Transit Authority has developed a plan for bringing Regional Rail service to the Triangle region, utilizing existing and new tracks on existing rail corridors. The first phase of the plan included a rail line running from downtown Raleigh to downtown Durham, with stops serving the Research Triangle Park and other destinations in between. Later phases would extend to North Raleigh. The future of the plan is currently uncertain, as TTA has withdrawn its application for federal funding for the first phase.

D. Issues and Considerations

The Comprehensive Plan Update should be sensitive to the following considerations:

- **Schedule.** The process should start in the first half of 2007 with the Submittal of a Public Review Draft Plan by late 2008, followed by public hearings and adoption in early 2009.
- **Public Involvement.** The update process should include public participation, including consensus building and conflict resolution around key issues. The involvement process should involve people, communities and constituencies that have historically not participated in the planning process.
- **Vision Statement.** The Comp Plan should have a vision statement about what Raleigh can and should be in the future. The vision should serve as a framework for the Comp Plan. The

vision may be articulated in the Comp Plan as a statement in the plan's introduction, through themes or as a method of organizing the traditional Comp Plan elements.

- **Reducing the number of policy layers, such as District Plans, Neighborhood Plans and Small Area Plans.** The consultant team will explore with DCP staff the numbers of policy layers within a given area within the city. Furthermore, Small Area Plans and Neighborhood Plans should be analyzed for consistency with other Comp Plan elements. Historically, some small area plans and neighborhood plans have been the key tool through which neighborhoods protected their interests and expressed their agendas. The Update program should include creative approaches to engage neighborhoods and address neighborhood-level issues without using neighborhood and small area plans.
- **Incorporation of Visuals.** The DCP seeks to produce a Comp Plan that is highly visual, using maps, charts, renderings, photos, and other graphic tools to convey information and illustrate policies. The DCP also intends to create a website version of the Comp Plan that is highly interactive, with maps and graphic to serve as Comp Plan and also as a tool to educate the public about growth planning and development.
- **Reconciling City and County Interests.** The Comprehensive Plan includes a relationship to County Planning policy, particularly with Extra Territorial Jurisdiction (ETJ) boundaries and short and long-range service areas. Coordination between the City and the County is important to ensure that the respective parts of the Comp Plan are consistent and mutually supportive.
- **Consistency between the Comp Plan and Zoning.** Recent actions by the State Legislature have strengthened the role of the Comprehensive Plan in the rezoning process. Greater specificity in our Comp Plan is needed for effective application of these standards. Consistency review is hampered by the fact that the current Comp Plan does not include a Land Use element or Map. The updated plan should include a Future Land Use Map and an updated Urban Form map that can be used to evaluate rezonings both in terms of use as well as form. The Update will likely also require changes to City's zoning ordinance, both the text and the map.
- **Keeping the policies current:** Changes in the market place, evolving land use trends, rapidly changing growth patterns, and the amount of land in the short and long-range urban service areas warrant examination on a regular basis. The Comp Plan should include methods to examine policies every year, with updates every 5 years and a new Comp Plan every 20 years.
- **Coordinating Multiple Planning Efforts.** The Comp Plan is one of several long-range planning efforts currently underway in Triangle Region. As the overarching policy guide for

the city, the Comp Plan should drive and guide these other efforts—although this has not been the case in the past. The update should be coordinated with more specific plans now being prepared for transportation, parks, and public facilities, among others.

- **Relationship to the Region.** Raleigh is not alone in growth. The Triangle Region and the surrounding counties are experiencing similar growth patterns. Raleigh’s future is inter-connected with the transportation, economy, affordable housing and quality of life of the surrounding counties. In addition to addressing local issues, the Comp Plan should acknowledge regional issues and incorporate a regional perspective.
- **Planning for Equity.** Although the Comp Plan is a physical document with a focus on land use, it should address the social challenges facing the city. Spatial issues associated with affordable housing, public safety, and diversity should be addressed. Comp Plan policies should recognize social equity concerns and incorporate strategies to protect residents, improve access to jobs, and strengthen neighborhoods that are distressed or at risk.
- **Need for Measurable Objectives and Implementing Actions in the Document.** The existing Comp Plan has little implementation focus, lacks measurable objectives, and does not have an “implementation or action” component. The updated Comp Plan should identify follow-up tasks, assign responsibilities and timelines for these tasks, and include a means of evaluating progress and success. The specific actions, plans, and programs needed to implement Comp Plan policies should be outlined in the document. DCP was reorganized in 2006. Part of that reorganization created an implementation group to administer implementation actions and CIP items.
- **Linkage to the Capital Improvement Plan.** The current Comp Plan contains many recommendations that involve capital improvements, and some of these end up in the Capital Improvement Plan. However, the Plan does not specifically call out such items, nor does it necessarily discuss their priority and timing. Further, there is no mandate that all potential CIP items in the Comp Plan actually be reflected in the CIP. The intent is for the new Plan to create a much stronger link to the CIP, such that the Comp Plan is used as the primary document setting priorities in the CIP.
- **Infrastructure capacity (water, sewer, transportation).** With rapid growth has come increased stresses in keeping up with the demand for infrastructure, including roadways, water, sewer, and stormwater. The Land Capacity Analysis has revealed the potential for another 120,000 housing units and 87 million square feet of non-residential floor space within the City’s planning jurisdiction under current zoning. Accommodating this growth will require significant new investment. Strategies addressing both supply (capacity) and demand should be studied, including the infrastructure impacts of different growth patterns and

scenarios, and the identification of areas where existing infrastructure could support increased development intensities.

- **Environmental sustainability:** Growth patterns within the City and region have resulted in what many consider to be a high quality of life, with a diverse housing stock, ample green space, and relatively manageable levels of traffic congestion. However, these same development patterns have raised sustainability issues including the region's above-average per capita annual vehicle-miles traveled (VMT); the impacts of development on water quality and water supplies; and the region's worsening air quality. Global warming and uncertainty over future global energy supplies make an assumption of abundant and low-cost fossil fuel energy a questionable one over the Plan's 20-year time horizon. The City is interested in pursuing policies that mitigate the environmental impacts of existing and future development and promote reduced energy use and the deployment of non-fossil fuel-based energy sources. An entire element is proposed to address these topics.
- **Transportation alternatives:** Along with the Triangle region, Raleigh has grown primarily in a suburban pattern over the last 30 years. Convenient opportunities for utilizing multiple travel modes are limited. As Raleigh continues to grow over the next 20 years and the capacity limits of transportation corridors are challenged, the need for travel alternatives and support for walkable development patterns will be a necessity. The Comp Plan update should identify opportunities to expand transportation alternatives and identify appropriate service corridors and activity nodes.